

Bjorn Lomborg on “Real Time with Bill Maher”, 21 September 2007

BM: Let me go to our satellite, this man is waiting for us. He is the Danish economist, his new book is called *Cool It*: Bjorn Lomborg. Bjorn, are you there?

BL: Hey, yes.

BM: Now, you're not the same guy who wants us to leave Britney alone, are you?

BL: Sorry?

BM: No, I'm just kidding. Alright, now, the subtitle of your book is “The Skeptical Environmentalist's Guide to Global Warming”. And I certainly agree that we should always be skeptical about absolutely everything. Keep asking questions, or else it becomes a religion. However, scientist almost down the line condemned your first book, and I noticed that on the blurbs on the back of your book you don't have ... you have two authors, an editor, and an economics professor. Uh, if the scientists are not saying you're cool, why should we believe anything you say about this?

BL: Well, you should not believe what I say. You should believe what I'm actually quoting, namely the UN climate panel. When we look at all these things we're talking about, for instance climate change is real, it's happening, and I'm trying to take us away from that very unproductive dichotomy of saying, “It's a hoax”—“No, it's a catastrophe”. It's neither. It's a problem, and let me give you just one example. When we look, for instance, at temperatures rising, it means we're going to see more heat deaths. That's absolutely true, and everybody points that out. But, of course, with increasing temperatures, we're also going to see fewer cold deaths, and we need to know both. For instance, for Britain, it's actually estimated that we are going to see 2,000 more heat deaths in 2050, but 20,000 fewer cold deaths. It seems to me that we're not going to make good judgements unless we know both things.

BM: Okay, but I ... for example, I read ... one reason I wanted to have you on this week is I read in the paper that we now have passage through the Northwest Passage. From the year 1500 on, they've been trying to get through this, and they could only get ... this is the passage from Greenland to Alaska, which has been ice. The only way to get through it was with an ice-breaker. Like, “Do you come here often?” And now there are ships that are just navigating it. Something like this worries me. It doesn't worry you?

BL: Well, it's certainly one part of the worry that we should be thinking about. But we should also realize that yes, there is, for instance, more sea ice in the Antarctic than we've ever had before. We should realize that there's many parts of this story, and yes, we are going to see problems from diminishing summer sea ice in the Arctic. We're probably going to see declining levels of polar bears, unless we do something about it. But the point again is then to say, everybody wants us to be a message of saying, “Okay, the answer has to be cut carbon emissions.” But the real answer is: look at what actually happens to polar bears. Even if we did the Kyoto protocol, we could avoid about one polar bear dying each year. Yet, we shoot about a thousand polar bears each year. I'm just saying, “Shouldn't we first start stopping shooting those thousand polar bears?”

BM: We definitely should.

BL: Wouldn't that be a smarter strategy?

BM: And I'm all for getting Micheal Vick out of Alaska, but ... we're concerned here with the polar bears more because it's something that is emblematic of greater change. It's not the fact that we want to go up there and pet polar bears. We're worried about sea-levels rising, and you're not worried about that?

BL: No, it is a problem, and I'm saying, “Climate change has good and bad things happening, overall there will be more bad things than good things.” But we both need to get a sense of proportion. Sea-levels are going to rise about a foot over the next century. The UN Climate Panel tells us it's somewhere between half and two feet. But a foot of sea-level rise is a problem, it's not the end of mankind. To give you a sense of proportion again: over the last hundred and fifty years, sea-levels rose about a foot. Yet, I would dare that was not part of the main thing we think about the twentieth century, it wasn't the end of civilization. Ask a very old person who lived through most of the twentieth century, What were the important things that happened? She'll likely talk about the

world wars, the suffrage for women, maybe the IT revolution. But she will not say, “Oh, and sea-levels rose.”

BM: Well, next time Joan Rivers is here, I will ask her.

BL: Please.

BM: But it's not a ... but it's not just about sea-levels rising, maybe a foot isn't so bad, we only lose Florida. But it's also that the oceans are getting more acidic, that coral reefs are being wiped out, there was a report recently that said in fifty years there may be no more fish. I mean, that's a pretty basic part of the human diet, fish, or at least mine.

BL: Yes.

BM: So, isn't that important?

BL: It certainly is, and that's also why I say we need to start thinking smartly about how we deal with climate change. Right now, we talk a lot, and we say, Let's do the Kyoto protocol, which costs a lot of money, we actually don't implement, and that even if we did would do very little good. I'm saying we need to get off this argument of saying, We need to cut right now. It makes us feel good, but it does very little good. Instead, we should focus on cutting the cost of cutting emissions, that is, invest in research and development on non-carbon-emitting energy technologies. Basically, to give you the point, and it's a metaphor, but obviously it really holds the main point: right now, solar panels cost about ten times the amount of fossil fuels. That means that rich people in rich countries will put up some, you know, mainly on sloping roofs to show their neighbours how good they are, but poor people in rich countries are not going to do it, and certainly China and India are not going to do it, because they have much more important priorities, like feeding their population or curing their kids from infectious diseases. And, so what I want to make sure is that we focus on research and development so this becomes much cheaper, so that solar panels become competitive with fossil fuels. That way, we'll not only leave better opportunities for our kids and grand-kids, but also for the Chinese and the Indians.

BM: Hey, but you don't care about global warming because you're from Denmark. You could use a little warm weather in Denmark. If you lived in Phoenix, you'd feel differently, my friend. But anyway, I'm kidding you and I thank you for joining us today. Bjorn Lomborg, everybody.

BL: Thank you, Bill. Thanks for being here.

BM: One of the great Wimbledon champs of all time. Remember that that backhand of his? Boy, he was something, on grass and clay.

RT: He's fucking confused the shit out of me, like, I've no idea what he just said. Everything seemed to be, like, No, no, it really is a problem, but buy my book too.

BM: Yeah.

SR: What I heard was, There is no connection between smoking and lung cancer. What we need is a lot more research. And we will pay for 20 years of it while we go on selling you cigarettes.

BM: And I worry that some ... you know that 20 years later, this guy is going to say, You know what, yeah, there is global warming. Because there seems to be this trend in this country of people not speaking out at the moment when they can effect change. Alan Greenspan this week comes out with his big book, and it's all about how the Republican Party abandoned their principles. Well, wouldn't that have been a good thing for him to say while he was the Fed chairman?

RT: They don't speak out ... It's not about change. They don't speak out when it can affect their career. They do it once they're safely ...